

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	:	
	:	
v.	:	Crim No. 2:23-cr-00016 JLS
	:	
BHASKAR SAVANI, et al.	:	
	:	

**DEFENDANTS’ REPLY TO GOVERNMENT’S RESPONSE IN OPPOSITION TO
DEFENDANTS’ EMERGENCY MOTION FOR TEMPORARY MODIFICATION OF
PRE-TRIAL RELEASE CONDITIONS TO ALLOW PERIODIC TRAVEL TO NEW
YORK, NEW JERSEY, AND THE MIDDLE AND WESTERN DISTRICTS OF
PENNSYLVANIA FOR A CHARITABLE PURPOSE**

Defendants Bhaskar, Arun, and Niranjani Savani (“Savani Brothers”), by their undersigned counsel, respectfully submit this Reply to the Government’s Response in Opposition to Defendants’ Motion (“Opposition”) to seek a short-term, temporary modification of their pre-trial release restrictions to enable the Savani Brothers to periodically travel to customer locations in New York, New Jersey, and the Middle and Western Districts of Pennsylvania to deliver mangoes imported from farms in India from now until mid-July 2023 in order to further their charitable efforts to support impoverished families in India.

I. INTRODUCTION

On May 22, 2023, the Savani Brothers submitted their straightforward Motion requesting a short-term modification of their pre-trial release travel restrictions between May and early July of this year, 2023, in order to permit the Savani Brothers to periodically travel to central and western Pennsylvania and the neighboring states of New York and New Jersey to personally deliver mangoes imported from the Savani Farm and other growers in rural India. Since 2007, Savani Farms, a Pennsylvania corporation, has imported into the United States approximately 20,000 to 30,000 cases of mangoes and has sold them to customers, largely of Indian descent, and

returned profits from the sales to India to support poor and underprivileged people of their home country.

To clarify their travel request, the Savani Brothers are willing and able to provide their Pre-Trial Services Officers with 24-hour notice of their request to travel, along with the names and addresses of customers to whom they will make deliveries. The Savani Brothers will not need to travel every day or with one another to deliver the mangoes. However, due to the sporadic nature of the deliveries and the time sensitivity of the deliveries to ensure that the mangoes are delivered while fresh, the travel requests would not occur in regular intervals.

The Savani Brothers pursue this request because of their strong desire to continue a charitable mission that began when they spearheaded the resumption of legal mango importation from India in 2007 following a visit to India by then-President George W. Bush—efforts for which the Savani Brothers received international acclaim. *See infra* at 5. If the Savani Brothers are denied the requested release condition modifications, approximately 2,000 boxes of highly perishable mangoes currently being stored in Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, along with additional mangoes that were previously ordered and that are scheduled to ship from India and arrive in the United States throughout the next few weeks, are in grave danger of rotting and becoming inedible. *See* Exhibit A (photos). The Savani Brothers lack sufficient volunteers to deliver the mangoes, and the cost of hiring employees and/or using shipping services is prohibitive because it would severely cut into the already slim profits made from the sale of the mangoes. Moreover, as explained further below, Defendants' ability to personally deliver the mangoes is an important tool in promoting and selling the mangoes.

On May 30, 2023, the Government filed its 26-page Opposition, with exhibits, to Defendants' Motion. The Government did not see fit to include a single mention of the allegedly

“suspicious” Savani Farms in the 100-page, 43-count indictment, following its wide-ranging, approximately eight-year investigation. That did not deter the Government from using its Opposition to a routine request to modify release conditions as a way to attack the Savani Brothers’ character, speculate about the purposes of transactions relating to Savani Farms, inflate the Court’s perception of the Savani Brothers’ wealth, baselessly diminish the importance of their substantial and culturally important charitable efforts, and attempt to litigate substantive factual and legal issues in this case.

The Court should reject the Government’s overzealous, unsupported arguments; ignore its thinly veiled attempt to litigate the merits of this case through a release-conditions request; and grant the Motion, along with any additional conditions or qualifications that the Court deems appropriate.

II. THE REQUESTED RELIEF DOES NOT POSE A FLIGHT RISK

In its Opposition, the Government argues in circular fashion that the “facial absurdity” of the Motion gives rise to the conclusion that it is nothing more than a means to help the Savani Brothers flee the United States because of the seriousness of the charges they face. Opp’n at 11. The lack of evidence the Government provides in support of this argument is telling. The Government claims that “prior to indictment,” it “received information” that the Defendants (which Defendants, we are not told) were planning to move their businesses overseas and flee the country if indicted. *Id.* at 9. The Government provides no redacted FBI-302 report nor corroborates the truthfulness or credibility of this statement. To the best of defense counsel’s knowledge, the Government never mentioned this information during the argument before the Magistrate Judge regarding bail and the conditions of pre-trial release or in connection with one of the Defendant’s subsequent motions for pre-trial release conditions.

Most importantly, the Government's newly revealed allegation regarding any alleged scheme to flee is too unreliable and vague for it to undermine the Defendants' request for a temporary modification of travel restrictions. That is especially true in light of the uncontested facts cutting in the opposite direction. First, the Savani Brothers, between January 2019 and January 2023, collectively made 25 trips to India and returned to the United States each time. These trips were made after the 2018 search warrant was executed by Government agents, and therefore, after the Savani Brothers knew they were under investigation.

Second, the Savani Brothers are United States citizens and have relinquished their Indian citizenship. Along with their wives, they have raised and educated children in the United States, and now those adult children are pursuing their own lives in this country. The Savani Brothers have chosen to make Pennsylvania their home and they have no intention of leaving. They fully intend to fight all of the charges in the Indictment at trial.

In furtherance of its constructed "scheme to flee" theory, the Government cautions the Court that the Defendants have access to private planes. Even a cursory investigation by the Government would have revealed that the only two planes that have not been seized—Sling LSA (Light Support Aircraft) that are maintained at a flight training school at Brandywine Airport in West Chester, Pennsylvania—are two-seaters used exclusively for private pilot training. These light-duty aircrafts have tanks that hold 39 gallons of fuel and can travel approximately 300-350 miles at maximum capacity. These planes are not able to fly outside the United States, let alone across the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans. None of the Defendants have pilot licenses or any pilot training. Unless the Government harbors concerns about the Savanis nose-diving into the Delaware Bay, it cannot seriously argue that these planes pose a risk of escape.

All Defendants, upon Indictment, turned in their passports. It may be safely assumed that the Government has placed Defendants' names on no-fly lists and taken other security steps to assure that the Defendants cannot pass through any security and customs checkpoints. The Government's claim that the Savani Brothers can flee the country, even if they wanted to do so—which they do not—is irrational and should not be used as a reason to deny Defendants' request for a modification of their pre-trial release conditions.

III. THERE IS NO RELIABLE EVIDENCE SAVANI FARMS IS INVOLVED IN “SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY”

The Government picks out random deposits and withdrawals with respect to the banking account of Savani Farms throughout 2022, claims the activity is “suspicious” and alleges, in the vaguest of terms, that the banking activity “raises more questions than answers regarding the veracity of claims” in Defendants' Motion. Opp'n at 12. This half-baked speculation should have no bearing on the Court's decision as to the requested release conditions modification.

Contrary to the nefarious portrait that the Government attempts to paint of Savani Farms, the Savani Brothers' efforts to import mangoes for charitable purposes have a long and well-documented history. The importation of mangoes into the United States from India was banned in 1989. During a trip to India in 2006, then-President George W. Bush was so impressed with the Indian mango that he was eager to lift the mango ban, especially with the lobbying of Indian-Americans. According to the attached 2018 article, “[t]he overturning of the ban and the arrangement of the first post-ban shipment was largely spearheaded by a Pennsylvania dentist named Bhaskar Savani.” *See* Exhibit B. The Savani Brothers worked and advocated for 6 years to lift the United States ban on imported mangoes from India. Having the opportunity to sell Indian mangoes in this country and send money back to their home country is a source of cultural pride for the Savani Brothers.

Casting aside any regard for how mangoes are distributed among Indian-Americans, the Government has questioned why the Savani Brothers have requested to deliver mangoes themselves, labeling the request “frivolous.” Opp’n at 2. The Savani Brothers have devoted time in order to personally deliver mangoes to customers since 2007. Through their very limited Motion, the Savani Brothers seek permission to do nothing new, but rather, what they have done since well before the Government’s investigation that resulted in the Indictment, and for several years after learning they were being investigated. The majority of the Savani Brothers’ U.S. customers are of Indian descent. By personally delivering the mangoes, the Savani Brothers seize the opportunity to network with existing customers and hope to be introduced to new customers in communities of people of Indian descent. They discuss, among other things, where the mangoes are farmed and that the profits from the sale of the mangoes are invested in beneficial humanitarian projects throughout rural India. These face-to-face meetings with customers are an important means by which the Savani Brothers market their mangoes.

Prior to the Indictment, the Savani Brothers, along with another family member who is also a defendant in this Indictment, volunteered to deliver mangoes. Additionally, they would, at times, pay existing employees, usually performing maintenance duties at their dental offices, to deliver mangoes. Since the Indictment, none of the Defendants can travel outside the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. Moreover, as a result of negative publicity from the Indictment, Defendants have had to close several of their dental offices and lay off employees due to a severe drop in patient bookings as well as the resignations by dentists. Therefore, the people who have historically delivered mangoes are either unable to do so due to release conditions or are no longer employed by the Defendants. Defendants did not predict this unfortunate change of circumstances and, thus,

had no reason to foresee that a chain of events would result in a delivery problem at the time of their initial bail hearing.

The Government also questions why customers do not pay for the cost of shipping for mango orders. There is a simple answer to this question. Because of their size and superior quality and taste, Indian mangoes are higher in cost than those found in ordinary grocery stores in the United States. If customers are required to pay shipping costs on top of the higher priced Indian mangoes, they may decide to forego the purchase all together. Without sales, there will obviously be no money to support the Savani Farms' charitable purpose and activities.

As stated above, Defendants, by filing their Motion to temporarily modify their release conditions, should not be put in a position to comb through the banking records of Savani Farms and provide an explanation for every transaction. However, because the Government devotes so much of its Opposition to this issue, Defendants will discuss a few of the larger transactions the Government superficially claims are suspicious. For example, the Government points to two transactions—for \$100,000 and approximately \$139,000, respectively—between Savani Farms and two customers Aumpi LLC and Poojaben LLC. Aumpi LLC and Poojaben LLC are customers of Savani Farms. The \$139,000 deposit into the Savani Farms bank account from Aumpi LLC was a total amount that appears to have occurred over a four-month period, from May 2022 through September 2022. The \$100,000 deposit from Poojaben LLC was made over the course of a three-month period, from June through September 2022.

The Government has also attached photos of the business addresses of these two customers which appear to be a motel with an attached business and another motel that the Government claims to be abandoned. Opp'n Exs. B–D. The Government did not apparently see fit to have an FBI field agent from its San Francisco FBI office travel the 44 miles to Fremont, California, the

address listed for Aumpi LLC, and make any inquiry. Likewise, the Government apparently decided it was not important enough to send an agent in its San Antonio office to drive less than two hours to Alice, Texas, to investigate the address of Poojaben LLC. Rather, the Government logged on to Google Maps, printed out the photos of these addresses, and attached them to its Opposition. *See* Opp'n at 13 n.8–9. There is no way of ascertaining whether these current locations looked the same when these customers ordered mangoes in 2022. If the Government believed that these two customers, their locations, and business transactions with Savani Farms were suspicious enough to include in a written submission to the Court, it is curious that it apparently conducted no investigation into them except looking at Google Maps.

The Savani Brothers do not personally know every one of their customers. It would not, however, be unusual or surprising to find a mango customer located at an address which is actually a motel. In describing these photos as suspicious, the Government may be unaware, or perhaps chose to ignore, that many people of Indian heritage living in the United States own and operate motels. It is commonplace for an Indian customer, including a motel owner, to place a large order for mangoes from Savani Farms and then resell or distribute the mangoes in their respective communities or religious organizations. Therefore, it is not unusual or suspicious to see a large banking transaction for seasonal mangoes between Savani Farms and one or more of its customers who are also engaged in the hospitality business as owners or operators of motels.

Upon further review of the Government's "suspicious activity" snapshot of Savani Farms' banking transactions, the Government apparently pleads ignorance as to why Savani Farms paid a substantial amount of money to Lion Foods, which is an Indian packaging and distribution company of food products, including fresh fruit. This information is readily available on the company's website. *See* www.lionfoods.com. Savani Farms has neither the capacity to grow all

of the mangoes that it sells under its label nor the equipment to package and ship mangoes to the United States and elsewhere. Thus, Savani Farms must pay a company like Lion Foods to package the mangoes in India and otherwise prepare and ship them to the United States in compliance with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's requirements. Shipping thousands of boxes of produce internationally in a timely and proper manner is a costly endeavor for a company, so a large wire transfer to Lion Foods should not appear unusual or suspicious.

IV. THE REQUESTED RELIEF DOES NOT POSE ANY RISK OF WITNESS TAMPERING

The Government claims to have evidence of Defendants' intimidation or tampering with witnesses.¹ Furthermore, absent from the Opposition is any explanation whatsoever of how the Motion's requested relief bears any relation to an increased risk of witness tampering. The Savani Brothers are already permitted to (and do) go to the office daily as part of their efforts to salvage the dental practices and real estate businesses that have floundered since the Indictment. They each have cell phones, which they use for work and personal business. The only things keeping the Savanis from contacting or tampering with witnesses are their own discretion and judgment. The Government fails to—because it cannot—supply a single reason for why traveling slightly outside the Eastern District's boundaries to deliver mangoes would enable the Savanis to have any interaction with witnesses that they could not otherwise have.

¹ During a June 5, 2023, phone conference with counsel for Arun Savani, the Government provided some additional detail regarding these allegations concerning plans to flee and contact with potential witnesses, both of which allegedly occurred prior to the indictment. Defendants do not believe this new information is material to the issue before the Court in this Motion. In any event, it should be incumbent on the Government to offer any such new information to the Court in a manner that is sufficiently detailed and reliable to affect the outcome of the pending Motion.

V. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the Savani Brothers respectfully ask this Honorable Court to grant the Motion and allow the limited relief requested. The Savani Brothers join in the Government's request for a hearing on the Motion, and respectfully request that the hearing be held on an expedited basis for the reasons stated herein.

Respectfully Submitted

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that the foregoing motion was filed and served upon counsel for all parties to this criminal case this day of June by way of the ECF system in use by the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

Dated: June 6, 2023

/s/ Terri A. Pawelski

Exhibit A

DISTRIBUTION AND SPOILAGE MATTER: INDIAN MANGO IS HIGHLY SENSITIVE
AND PERISHABLE FRUIT

Please see some of the pictures of the mango distribution warehouse and spoilage.





Exhibit B

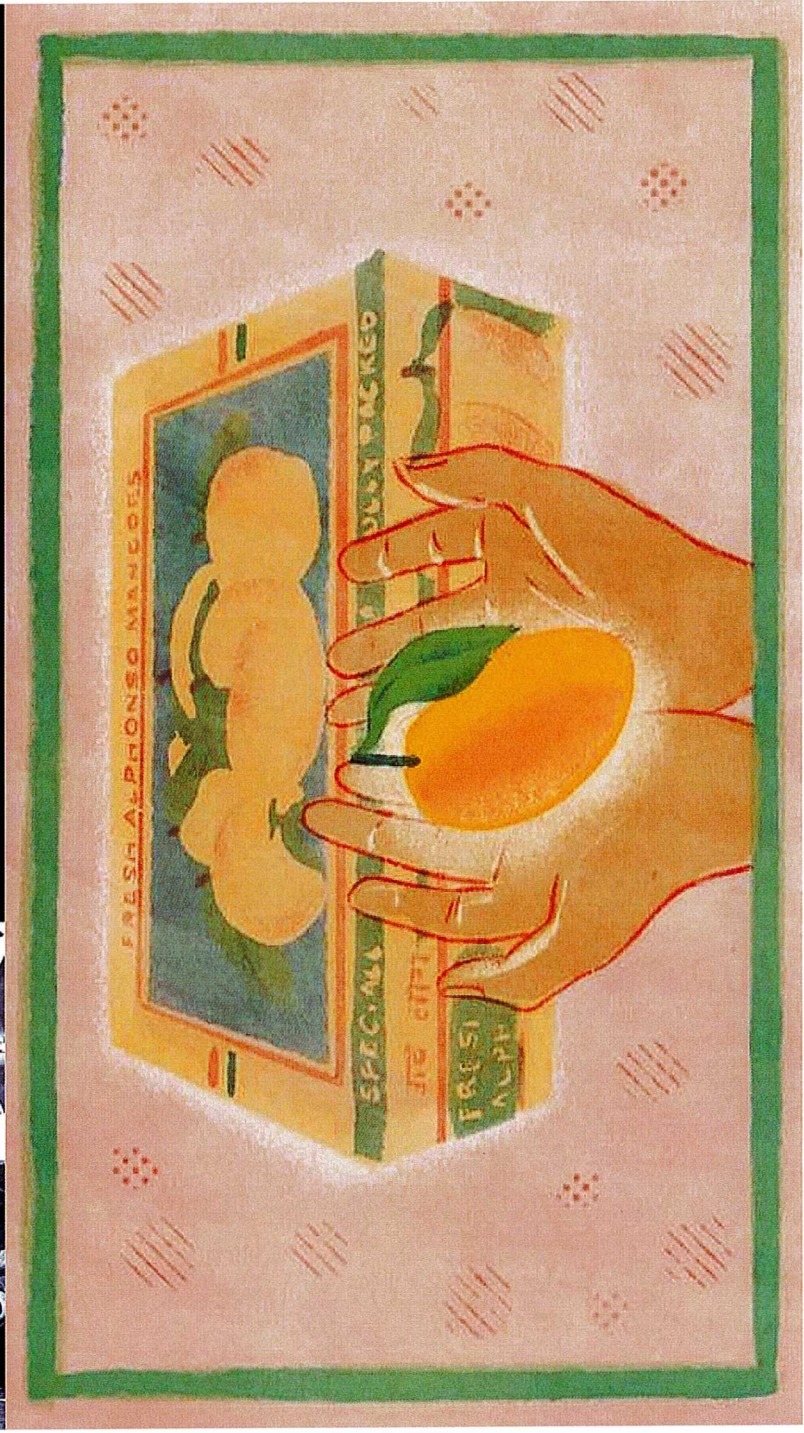


ILLUSTRATION BY ADAM WALTO

FYI.

This story is over 5 years old.

MUNCHIES

Came.

Although the ban on India's Alphonso mangoes was lifted a decade ago, they're still virtually impossible to find in America. Here's why.

MK By [Myles Karp](#)

February 7, 2018, 12:00pm [f](#) [t](#) [s](#) [p](#)

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On April 27, 2007, a shipment of 150 boxes of Indian mangoes arrived at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York in what *The New York Times* described as “probably the most eagerly anticipated fruit delivery ever.”

This shipment was the result of years of maneuvering and lobbying efforts that went straight to the top; even then-president George W. Bush had been plied with an Indian mango sample. The importation of Indian mangoes into the US had been officially banned since 1989, ostensibly due to concerns over pests that might have spread to American crops. Even before the ban, mango shipments from India had been vanishingly rare.

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The advertisement features a large red-to-orange gradient rectangle on the left with the text "How to help support groundbreaking cancer research" in white. To the right, there is a blue Freedom Plus credit card, a red "Learn more" button, and logos for Mastercard and Stand Up To Cancer.

Indian-Americans, in particular, knew exactly what they had been missing. India is the spiritual, cultural, botanical, agricultural, and culinary homeland of the mango—scientifically, *Mangifera indica*. The South Asian nation grows far more mangoes than any other, representing over 40 percent of the world's production of the fruit. Over 1,000 varieties grow in India, each one celebrated and defended in its region, from the bright orange Kesar of Gujarat to the small green Langra of Uttar Pradesh.

But more important than quantity and variety is the fact that India's mangoes are, by almost all accounts, the world's most delicious.

Los Angeles-based horticulturist and University of California, Riverside researcher who wrote the original New York Times article on the 2007 shipment. "It's their center of origin and diversity and excellence, and there's nothing better than a great Alphonso mango."



PHOTO: DHIRAJ SINGH/BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

Ah, the Alphonso; among India's beloved varieties, none is more famous than the Alphonso, grown mostly near Ratnagiri, Maharashtra, and sometimes called the "king of mangoes."

Many times in my life, I've eaten something that is supposedly the prime exemplar of its category—the best banana, the best anchovy, the best burrito—and I've found the quality differential to be subtle; I've learned accordingly to temper my expectations with these kinds of things. But the one time I was able to eat an Alphonso mango, at the diminutive fruit stand at the luxury London department store Harrod's, I was blown away. I remember being amazed that fruit that good could actually exist. The flesh was a deep and uniform marigold color, completely devoid of the stringy fibers that sometimes plague supermarket mangoes. The aroma and taste was not qualitatively different from the mangoes I had known, but intensified manifold, as if the souls of ten mangoes had been concentrated in just one fruit. It was the Platonic ideal of a mango, this Alphonso mango.

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The overturning of the ban and the arrangement of the first post-ban shipment was largely spearheaded by a Pennsylvania dentist named Bhaskar Savani, who was born and raised in Gujarat but moved to the United States in 1990 to attend dental school.

“My father used to come in the summertime and smuggle mangoes for me. And he got caught one time,” Dr. Savani told me over the phone in December. “I was outside of JFK Airport looking for him. Sure enough, he shows up three hours later; he was smelling like mangoes completely. He said he had to stay because the USDA inspector told him to throw the mangoes in the trash can. He ate as much as he could, like three or four kilos of mangoes.” This episode set the young dentist off on a convoluted six-year mission to understand and eventually defeat the ban.

It was on a visit to India in 2006 that Bush tried an Alphonso mango, announcing to Singh that it was “a hell of a fruit.”

Savani’s research convinced him that the ban was as much due to political reasons and bureaucratic inaction as it was due to legitimate phytosanitary concerns. Mango stakeholders with operations in Latin America, the source of nearly all mangoes eaten in the US, feared competition from India, with its copious production of delicious mangoes. And the potential pests could be neutralized by irradiating the fruit, a practice that had already been employed in sterilizing meat and other produce, and which harms the taste and texture of a mango less than the hot water treatment used for most mangoes imported from Latin America.

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Ron Somers, then the president of the US-India Business Council, recognized an opportunity. "I got roped into this thing because we were at the time at the cusp of an extraordinary period in US-India relations that relates to the US-India Civil Nuclear Deal," he told me in a December phone call. Bush and then-Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh had been negotiating the separation of India's civil and military nuclear facilities, which Somers described as having a secondary effect of bringing India to the table as a more prominent trading partner. "And here we had this nagging issue of why can't we be importing more Indian mangoes and help out the Indian farmer. Such an extraordinary fruit, the king of fruits."

During the course of the nuclear talks, Savani and Somers sought to bring the mango issue to the leaders' attention. It was on a visit to India in 2006 that Bush tried an Alphonso mango, announcing to Singh that it was "a hell of a fruit."



The team learned that, auspiciously, the US Trade Representative had been lobbying to get Harley-Davidson motorcycles into India. The motorcycles, as iconically American as mangoes are Indian, had been disallowed due to strict emissions standards. Ultimately, a deal was arranged that basically swapped access for Harleys into India with that of mangoes into the US.

Savani's shipment arrived in New York to a veritable media frenzy. Outlets in both India and the United States celebrated the arrival, as well as the diplomatic triumph of a symbiotic Harleys-for-mangoes swap.

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Indian mangoes seemed ripe to gain a significant foothold in the US. Reports suggested that eventually these fruits would end up ubiquitous enough to make their way into McDonald's smoothies, or onto the shelves at Costco. During a small WNYC-organized radio taste test, a pre-fame Dominique Ansel, who would eventually invent the Cronut, called an Alphonso mango "amazing" and apparently asked for Savani's phone number. Some even expressed concern about India's ability to keep up with the subsequent demand.



DR. BHASKAR SAVANI (CENTER) AND HIS BROTHERS CELEBRATING THE FIRST POST-BAN SHIPMENT OF INDIAN MANGOES TO THE US IN 2007. PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. SAVANI.

But now, more than a decade later, these Indian mangoes are virtually nowhere to be found. Alphonsoes never seemed to show up at specialty produce stores, let alone at McDonald's. The promise of widespread access to the world's most delicious mangoes seems to have gone unfulfilled.

So what happened?

I regret to inform you that your mangoes suck. You may think I'm making a snap judgment with that statement, but the current mango production and importation infrastructure nearly guarantees that if you eat a mango in the United States, it is one of a few varieties grown in one of a few places. According to the available USDA data for 2017, 73.3 percent of mango imports into the US came from Mexico. Add in Peru and Brazil, and you can account for over 90 percent. (India, on the other hand, represents just 0.18 percent of American mango imports, or about one in every 500 mangoes, despite growing almost half of the world's supply.)

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...red, red-ringed, that green variety, that almost certainly when you see it. Even if your most recent recent supermarket mango acquisition wasn't a Tommy Atkins, it was probably one of a related mediocre variety, likely the Kent.

The origins of these shitty mangoes can shed some light on our gustatory misfortune. In the late 1800s, a number of attempts were made to grow mangoes in the United States; most of the plants and fruits either died in transport or languished after planting. Then, in 1889, an American professor in Pune, India sent 12 trees of six varieties—Alphonso, Banchore, Banchore of Dhiren, Devarubria, Mulgoba, and Pirie—to the Federal Department of Agriculture in Washington. The material was then sent on to horticulturalists in present-day Palm Beach County, Florida. Nine years later, only two trees, an Alphonso and a Mulgoba, were alive, though the Alphonso was sickly.

In 1898, the Mulgoba finally began to fruit. Because it succeeded where all others failed, the Mulgoba was propagated throughout southern Florida and became the ancestor of nearly all our mediocre commercial varieties, mostly named for the landowners on whose property a particularly productive Mulgoba-derived descendent originated: examples include Captain John J. Haden of Coconut Grove, Thomas H. Atkins of Broward County, and Leith D. Kent, also of Coconut Grove.

Food
China Is Growing 'Space Mangoes'
NICK ROSE
03.27.17

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The fact that all mango trees other than the Mulgoba died was not an effect of neglect, amateurism, or bad luck. Mangoes were simply out of their element in Florida. The Indian varieties tend to grow in areas that are hotter and drier than (or at least different from) the conditions in Florida, and even today, South Florida represents a geographic and climatic extreme in the fruit's range of potential survival. The Mulgoba got a lucky break.

But there's also something fishy about the American Mulgoba. The one that survived in Florida looked nothing like the Mulgoba in India, or any Indian variety for that matter. It may have been mislabeled, it may have been a

...because, whatever the origins of the mango, it has never one of the beloved Indian varieties. Though the Alphonso almost survived, it was an offbeat Mulgoba that just happened to make it in Floridian conditions, and so we're stuck with its lame descendants.



PHOTO: DHIRAJ SINGH/BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

It was agricultural productivity rather than taste that propelled the proliferation of these Florida varieties. Tommy Atkins himself submitted his eponymous mango to the Florida Mango Forum repeatedly in the 1950s, and though the fruit was summarily rejected for its blandness and tough, fibrous flesh, it grew well, and so farmers and industrialists subsequently planted it and other high-yielding Florida varieties throughout the Americas.

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There are a number of reasons why we get so much of our produce from Latin America, and particularly Mexico. Land is abundant and cheap; the sun is strong; labor is inexpensive; and most importantly, it's close to the United States. Much of the final consumer price of a fruit comes from

states from Mexico by truck from South America, large loads via container ship can arrive long before the fruit's shelf life expires, and economy of scale keeps transportation costs low.

“Whenever these mangoes hit the United States, whether [the shipment is] arriving in Newark or whether it’s arriving in some other major airport, the word spreads like wildfire, and the mangoes are gone within a day.”

The system of growing Florida hybrids in Latin America—mostly Mexico—and sending them to the US by truck or container ship isn’t perfect. But the industry is content for now; high quantities of mangoes can reach stores without spoiling, sell for cheap, and please consumers that don’t realize how much better mangoes truly can be.

India, unlike Mexico, is very far from the United States. This is, and always has been, the primary obstacle to mass importation of mangoes from India. Ground shipping is out of the question, unless James Bond or Bruce Wayne wants to lend Dr. Savani some high-speed, amphibious trucks for cheap. At two to three weeks or more, the marine voyage is just a bit too long, and the fruits didn’t hold up so well the few times importers have tried this method.

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The only other option is an airplane. This is how the only viable Indian mango shipments have been transported, including all of Savani’s. But it is, of course, significantly more expensive than getting a Tommy Atkins to your grocery store from Latin America by truck or boat. “Most of the money we spend is in air transportation,” Savani said. “Air transportation is three times costlier than the mango itself.”

USDA protocols provide another significant bottleneck that can delay shipments, increase prices, and limit the potential quantity of Indian mangoes coming into the US. The mangoes have to be irradiated, and there are only two USDA-certified gamma radiation facilities in India. This

of last year, the USDA inspector goes there, he has to provide a nice five star hotel and a car, and that cost will be divided per box on the exporters,” Savani said. “And the inspector will work only two to eight hours.” This bottleneck, however, may soon be alleviated, as the USDA is beginning to delegate the oversight to locals.

Despite these obstacles, Savani is actually doing pretty well. He sells about US \$1 million of mangoes each season, though his profit margins are small. Most of the mangoes end up in the hands of Indian-Americans, who find out about shipments via word-of-mouth.

“Whenever these mangoes hit the United States, whether [the shipment is] arriving in Newark or whether it’s arriving in some other major airport,” said Somers, “the word spreads like wildfire, and the mangoes are gone within a day—I mean, literally scooped up.”

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“For mangoes flown by air there’s going to be limited demand, mostly just from Indians, those who have sufficient financial resources to even consider buying something that expensive,” said Karp. “But if you grew up with it and it’s emblematic of your childhood or youth, of course there’s going to be considerable temptation to buy such a fruit.”

So, just how expensive are the scarce Alphonso mangoes that reach the US?

Because there is no well-established infrastructure or standard supply chain, prices vary significantly. One listing on Amazon sells a box of six Alphonsoes for \$155.97 including shipping, or just about \$26 per mango. These are probably flown on-demand, one box at a time, with no economy of scale.

But the biggest surprise of my conversation with Savani, after all this research about the inaccessibility of his product, was that the good dentist manages to sell his mangoes for a pretty damn reasonable price. He sells each box of ten to 12 Kesars for around \$30 wholesale to members of the Indian-American community. And in another surprising revelation, Savani told me that in the past few years he’s been selling his Kesars (which he markets as “Saffron mangoes”) for between \$2.99 and \$3.49 each through

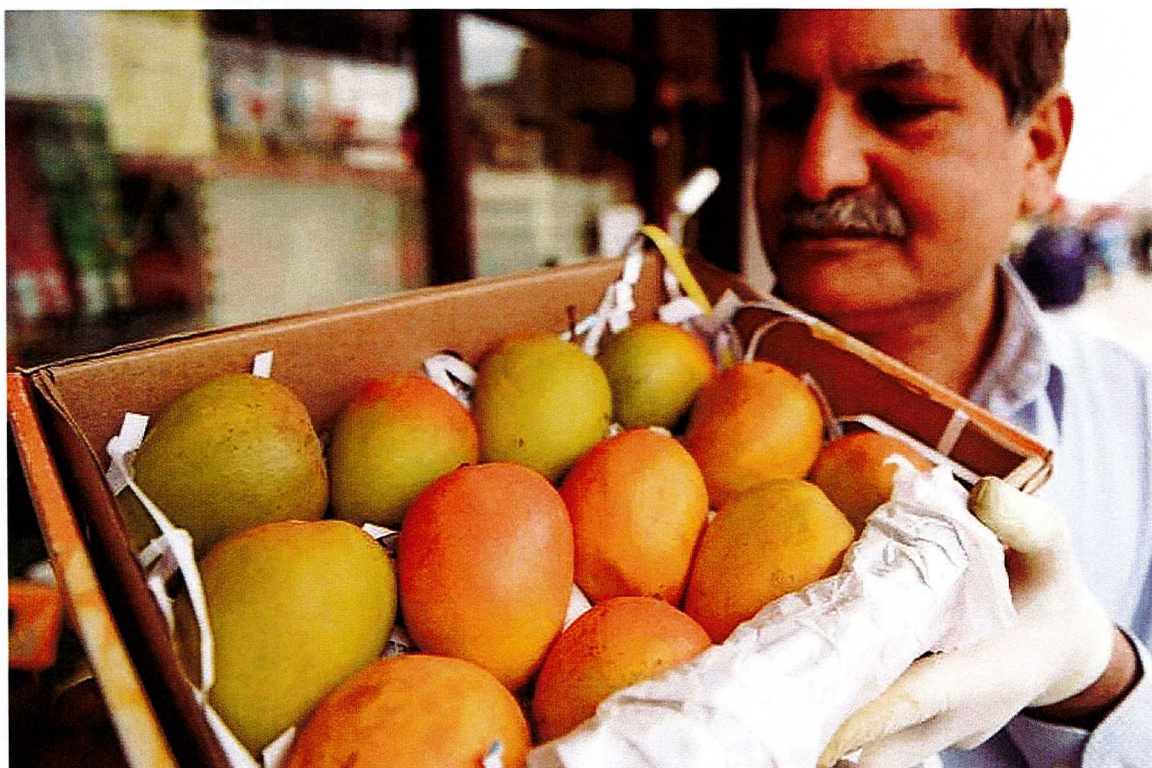


PHOTO: LEON NEAL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Although the supply is limited and seasonal, this means the entirety of Savani's stock no longer gets scooped up immediately after landing at JFK. (If your curiosity is piqued, [keep your eyes on this link](#) as summer approaches.) He hasn't sold Alphonso through FreshDirect yet, but he hopes to begin to in the near future, and he expects that they'll cost only 50 cents more than the Kesars. These prices eclipse those of Latin American supermarket mangoes, which usually retain for under a dollar, but in the context of insanely delicious things, they're not bad at all.

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The extreme price variance is clear evidence that imported Indian mangoes aren't doomed to be perpetually inaccessible; improvements to the supply chain could bring the prices down to the extent that while they still wouldn't compete with Mexican Tommy Atkins mangoes, Kesars and Alphonso could be within the reach of many consumers.

some of its stringent exportation protocols, irradiation facilities are being built both within the US and nearby, alleviating the aforementioned bottleneck in production. And although marine shipping hasn't worked out yet, Savani suggested that something called "hypobaric intermodal containers" could open up that possibility in the future.

Although Savani himself has been the primary soldier in the battle for Indian mango access, he can't continue to fight alone. Running a chain of dental offices is, obviously, a full-time job. His "mango mission," he told me, is not to grow indefinitely, but rather to provide a taste of the homeland to his fellow members of the Indian diaspora, as well as support the local community back in Gujarat, where the importation business has helped to build five schools and protect the habitat of the last wild lion population in Asia.

But if the right people take on the challenge, Savani insisted, a sustainable and lucrative Indian mango importation business could be synthesized.

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"Amazon could do a better job," he said. "I don't know why they aren't doing it."

He's onto something. Amazon has managed to build perhaps the world's most efficient shipping logistics systems, and their June 2017 acquisition of Whole Foods suggests that they want to be a grocery industry powerhouse. It's not likely that any importer, whether on the scale of Amazon or a Pennsylvania dentist with a sweet tooth, will gain the necessary economy of scale to build a large and sustainable Indian mango importation business without demand. And right now, there simply isn't much demand for Indian mangoes, because apart from the Indian diaspora, most people just don't know what they're missing.

"If the National Mango Board really cared about flavor, they'd be blind to the origin of the product, and they'd try and make some straight blind testing

| chooses."

Many of the experts I spoke with hinted that the major stakeholders in the current mango business are incentivized not to market Indian mangoes, because they mostly have financial interests in Latin American production areas. But Will Cavan, a former importer and prolific blogger of mango-related issues, basically suggested a conspiracy. (Savani called Cavan the "Trump of the mango world," in the sense that he speaks his mind and often butts heads with authority; I'm not sure the size of Cavan's hands or the power he wields over a nuclear button.) For years, he has been lobbying against the National Mango Board, the body responsible for marketing mangoes in the United States, through his [International Mango Organization blog](#).

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"If the National Mango Board really cared about flavor," he said, "they'd be blind to the origin of the product, and they'd try and make some straight blind testing and see what the consumer really chooses. The biggest obstacle that the Indians have working against them is that they don't have anyone helping them market their product, versus the National Mango Board which is locked in with these unflavorful fruits." (Although a spokesperson for the National Mango Board assured me that "The purpose of the NMB is to promote all mangoes, regardless of variety or where they are produced," it is true that all of the foreign members of the Board are from Latin America.)

But the first step in shaking up this status quo, Cavan added, is making people aware that they're being sold mediocre mangoes.

"Articles like what you're writing are going to enlighten people and they're going to go outside of their current—I wouldn't call it a 'comfort zone'—the *prison* they're in, eating these Tommy Atkins that don't have any flavor."

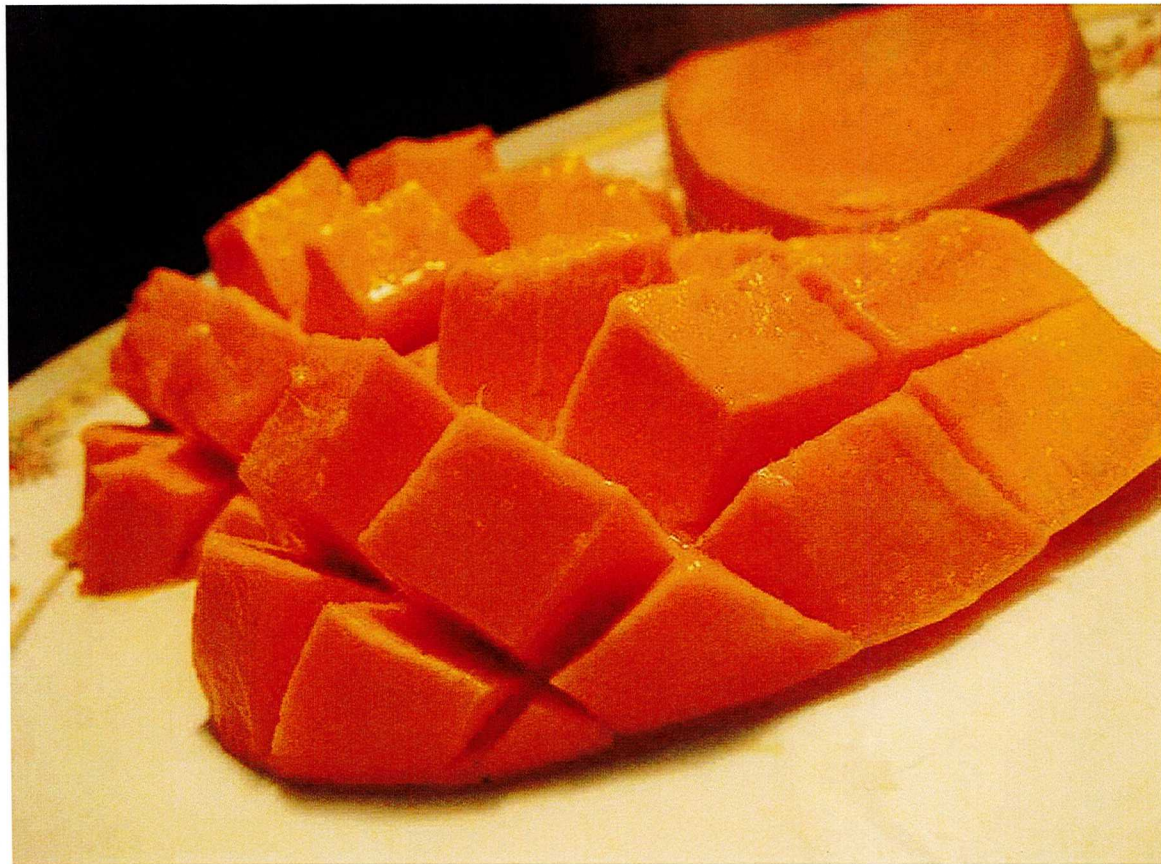
After this diatribe, please allow me to contradict myself: I don't necessarily think Indian mangoes should be imported to the United States on a large scale. Even if a company like Amazon were to streamline the supply chain, the carbon footprint of any mango traveling 9,000 miles would still be huge.

egregious carbon emissions. He could grow Indian mangoes in the Americas. This is already happening on a small scale, but it's not easy.

"Certain fruits have a certain place in the world where God has created that perfect environment," Savani said. "It's very difficult to replicate things like soil conditions and air conditions."

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Despite the fact that the original Alphonso trees in Florida died in that historic shipment over a century ago, there are Alphonsoes currently growing in Florida. But Savani has tried them, and he estimates that they only have about 60 or 70 percent of the flavor of their Indian counterparts.



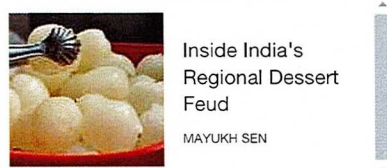
THE FLESH OF AN INDIAN ALPHONSO MANGO. PHOTO VIA FLICKR USER SHAYER JALEEL

"I have smuggled graft everywhere in the world," said Savani. "I'm trying to see if there's any microclimatic weather that can really bring that aroma out." Cavan suggested Peru as a potential Alphonso growing nation; nearby

On a small scale, I'm pretty happy that he had some venture in the works involving growing Indian-derived varieties somewhere in the Americas.

"My opinion about the Alphonso is that it's a wild and undomesticated mango. If you take the Alphonso from the homeland, it's not happy almost anywhere [...] It's super sensitive."

Successfully growing Indian mangoes might not necessarily require finding microclimates that mimic the Southwestern Maharashtra coast for the Alphonso or the Girnar foothills of Gujarat for the Kesar. It might, instead, be a matter of breeding new mangoes with Indian genetics that could survive in new places.



Noris Ledesma is the Curator of Tropical Fruit at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, an epicenter of American fruit research, as well as the head of Fairchild's mango breeding program. She currently has 650 hybrids growing on her experimental plantation in Florida, including many derived from Indian varieties like the Alphonso and the Kesar. She believes that she actually has a solid replacement for the Kesar, which she calls the jumbo Kesar, that can grow well outside of India.

Hybridizing a local Alphonso has, however, proven more difficult. "My opinion about the Alphonso is that it's a wild and undomesticated mango," Ledesma said. "If you take the Alphonso from the homeland, it's not happy almost anywhere [...] It's super sensitive. It has to have the right breeze from the Indian Ocean, the rocky red soil, the touch of the local farmer.

"Any time that I try to grow Alphonso in different areas, even though it produces fruit, the fruit is not the same."

She thinks a good Alphonso hybrid is not unattainable, whether it comes from her program or a breeding program in India. "But the problem with Alphonso is that the Indian consumer doesn't want another Alphonso—they want their own Alphonso."

This hypothetical mango snob might be right. All my conversations with mango experts recalled the concept of *terroir*, a phrase used in wine to

grow under even slightly different conditions. There might be only one true Alphonso, and we might have to fly it from India if we want it in the US.

Whether Amazon figures out how to ship mangoes from India for cheap, or whether someone finds a pocket of Mexico that has the exact same weather conditions as Ratnagiri, or whether Ledesma manages to breed a less finicky Alphonso, one thing is clear: Better mangoes are likely in our future.

And we deserve better than the Tommy Atkins or the Kent. But maybe it's up to us, America's curious and hungry, to demand change. Call your congressional representative; call Jeff Bezos; picket the National Mango Board; print a copy of this article, fold it into a paper airplane, and chuck it over the White House fence. If we can send astronauts to the moon, surely we can realize the as-of-yet unfulfilled promise of abundant Indian mangoes in American grocery stores.

Maybe we should divert some of NASA's funding for this. Nothing delicious grows on the moon, anyway.

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